The Plague Doctor

Der Doctor Schna- -bel von Rom
Vas Credulis ab eine fabel.
quod scribitur vom Doctor schnabel,
der flugt die Contagion
et autert seinen sohn darvon.
Cadavera sucht er zu fressen
gleich wie der Corvus auf der Mysen.
Ah Credite, zihet nicht dort hin.
dann Romæ regnat die Pestin.
Quis non doberet sehr erschee
für seiner Virgul oder stecken,
qua loquitur, als wär er stumm.
und deutet sein Consilium.
Wie mancher Credit ohne zweifel
das ihm tentur ein schwartzer teufel.
Marzipanum heisst seine Höll.
und aurum die scholze seel.
I. Columbina, ad vivum delineavit.
Kleidung wider den Tod zu Rom. Anno 1656.
Also gehen die Doctores Medici daher zu Rom, wann sie die, an der Pest ertrancket sei,
sonen besuchen, sie zu curiren und tragen, sich wider das Gifft zu sichern, ein langes Kleid von ge,
wächstem Tuch ihr Angesicht ist verlarvt, für den Augen haben sie grosse Crystalline Brillen, wider
Nasen einen langen Schnabel voll wolriechender Specerey, in den Hände, welche mit Hand schuhen
wol versehen ist, eine lange Ruthe und darmit deuten sie, was man thun, und gebrauche soll.

Plague doctor

A plague doctor was a physician who treated victims of the bubonic plague during epidemics. These physicians were hired by cities to treat infected patients regardless of income, especially the poor that could not afford to pay.

Plague doctors had a mixed reputation, with some citizens seeing their presence as a warning to leave the area. Some plague doctors were said to charge patients and their families additional fees for special treatments or false cures. In many cases these doctors were not experienced physicians or surgeons; instead, being volunteers, second-rate doctors, or young doctors just starting a career. In one case, a plague doctor was a fruit salesman before his employment as a physician. Plague doctors rarely cured patients; instead serving to record death tolls and the number of infected people for demographic purposes.

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quod scribitur vom Doctor schnabel,
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Cadavera sucht er zu fryten
gleich wie der Corvus auf der Myten.
Ah Credite, ziehet nicht dort hin,
dann Romæ regnat die Pestin.
Quis non deberet sehr erschrec
fur seiner Virgul oder stecken,
qua loquitur, als wär er stumm,
und deutet sein Consilium.
Wie mancher Credit ohne zweifel
das ihm tentir ein schwartzen
Marsupium heißt seine Höll,
und aurum die geholte seel.
I. Columbina ad vivum delineavit.
Paulus Furst. Excudit.
Kleidung wider den Tod zu Rom. Anno 1656.
Also gehen die Doctores Medici dahe zu Rom, wann sie die andere Pest ertrancte Per-
sonen besuchen, sie zu curiren und tragen, sich wider Gifft zu sichern, ein langes Kleid von ge-
wärtem Tuch ihr Angesicht ist verlarvt, für den Augen haben sie grosse Crystalline Brillen, wider
Naseneuren langen Schnabel voll wolriechender Specerey, in der Hände, welche mit Handschuhen
wol versehen ist, eine lange Ruthe, und darmit deuten sie, was man thun, und gebrauche soll.

Copper engraving of Doctor Schnabel (i.e., Dr. Beak), a plague doctor in seventeenth-century Rome, circa 1656

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plague_doctor_costume#/media/File:Beak_doctor_mask.jpg

A beaked Venetian carnival mask bearing a picture of a plague doctor, and the inscription Medico della Peste ("Plague doctor") beneath the right eye

The clothing worn by plague doctors was intended to protect them from airborne diseases during outbreaks of the Bubonic Plague in Europe. It is often seen as a symbol of death and disease. However, the costume was worn by a comparatively small number of medieval and early modern physicians studying and treating plague patients.

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I. Columbina, ad vivum delineavit.
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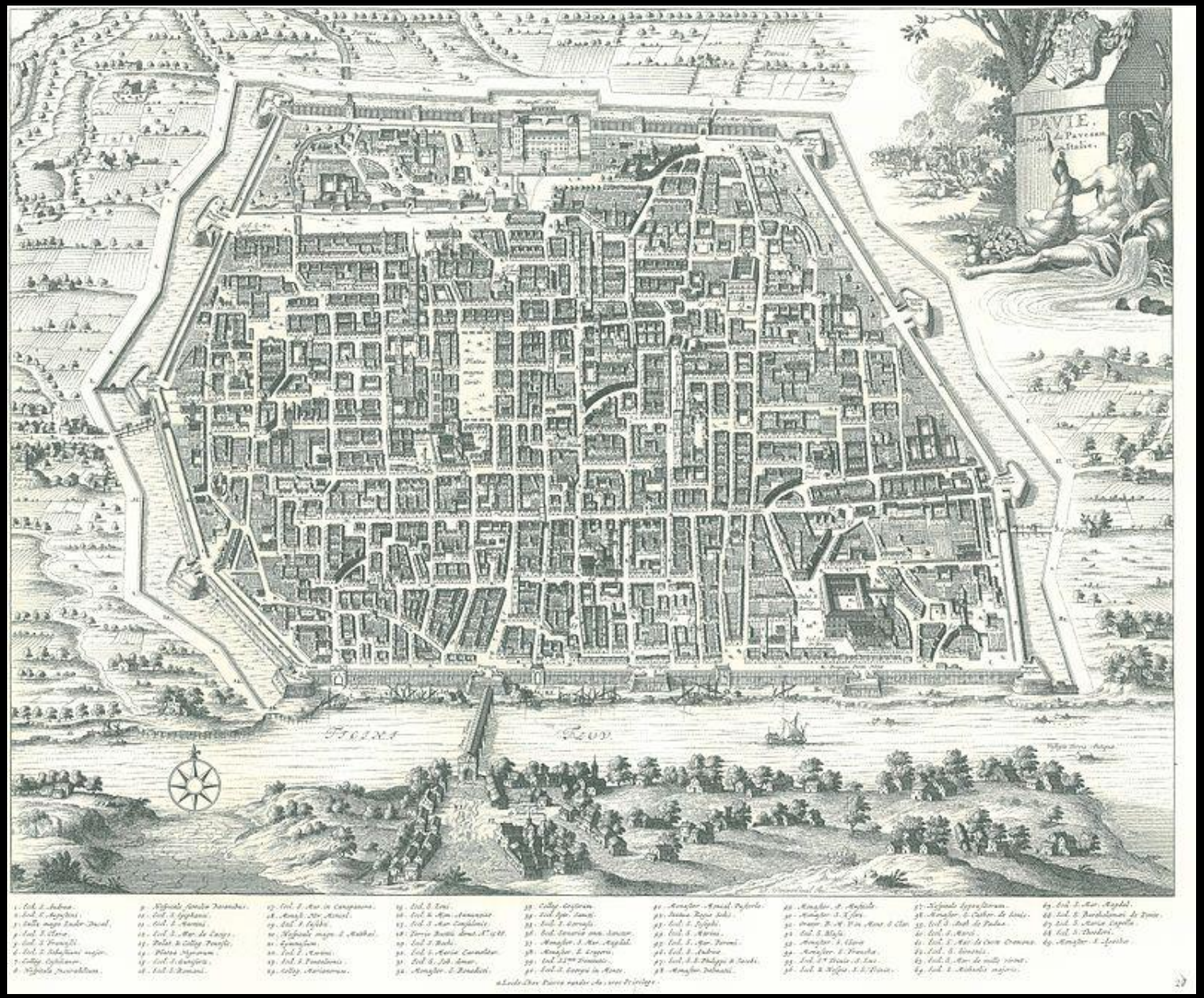
Kleidung wider den Tod zu Rom. Anno 1656.
Also gehen die Doctores Medici daher zu Rom, wann sie die, an der Pest erkrancke Leut besuchen, sie zu curiren und tragen, sich wider Gifft zu sichern, ein langes Kleid von gewächstem Tuch, ihr Angesicht ist verlarvt, für den Augen haben sie grosse Crystalline Brillen, vor der Nasen einen langen Schnabel voll wolriechender Specereyen, in der Hände welche mit Handschuhen wol versehen ist, eine lange Ruthe, und darmit deuten sie, was man thun, und gebrauchen soll.

History

The exact origins of the costume are unclear, as most depictions come from satirical writings and political cartoons. The beaked plague doctor may have first been a fictional character in theater and inspired doctors to use the look for their costumes. Depictions of the beaked plague doctor rose in response to superstition and fear about the unknown source of the plague. Often, these plague doctors were the last thing a patient would see before death; therefore, the doctors were seen as a foreboding to death.

The garments were first mentioned by physician to King Louis XIII of France, Charles de L'Orme, who wrote in a 1619 plague outbreak in Paris that he developed an outfit made of Moroccan goat leather, including boots, breeches, a long coat, hat and gloves modeled after a soldier's canvas gown which went from the neck to the ankle. The garment was impregnated with similar fragrant items as the mask. L'Orme wrote that the mask had a "nose half a foot long, shaped like a beak, filled with perfume with only two holes, one on each side near the nostrils, but that can suffice to breathe and to carry along with the air one breathes the impression of the drugs enclosed further along in the beak"



Giovanni de Ventura was a municipal plague doctor for the town of Pavia. He was a certified physician from a university and had a degree.

When Ventura negotiated a "spectacular" plague doctor contract in 1479 with the town of Pavia to treat plague patients, he was fresh out of school and desired to start a medical career. He became a plague doctor for the city of Pavia, which involved a sixteen-clause contract with the city. The salary he received was 30 florins per month (plus full citizenship and a free house), which was five to six times the salary of a skilled person of the time – the average skilled person earned about 60 florins per year, where Ventura received 360 florins per year.

Ventura was also to receive an adequate completely furnished house in an adequate location with supplemental living costs. He also received a cash advance and a severance package when he left at the end of his contract which consisted of two months' pay. He was not to require a fee from a plague patient, since the town was paying him, unless they offered freely. If the town had too many plague victims that his salary was not obtainable, then he was free to leave with no further obligations. Likewise, if he received pay and died before his normal services were performed, his heirs (perhaps parents) were not obligated to return any of that advanced pay

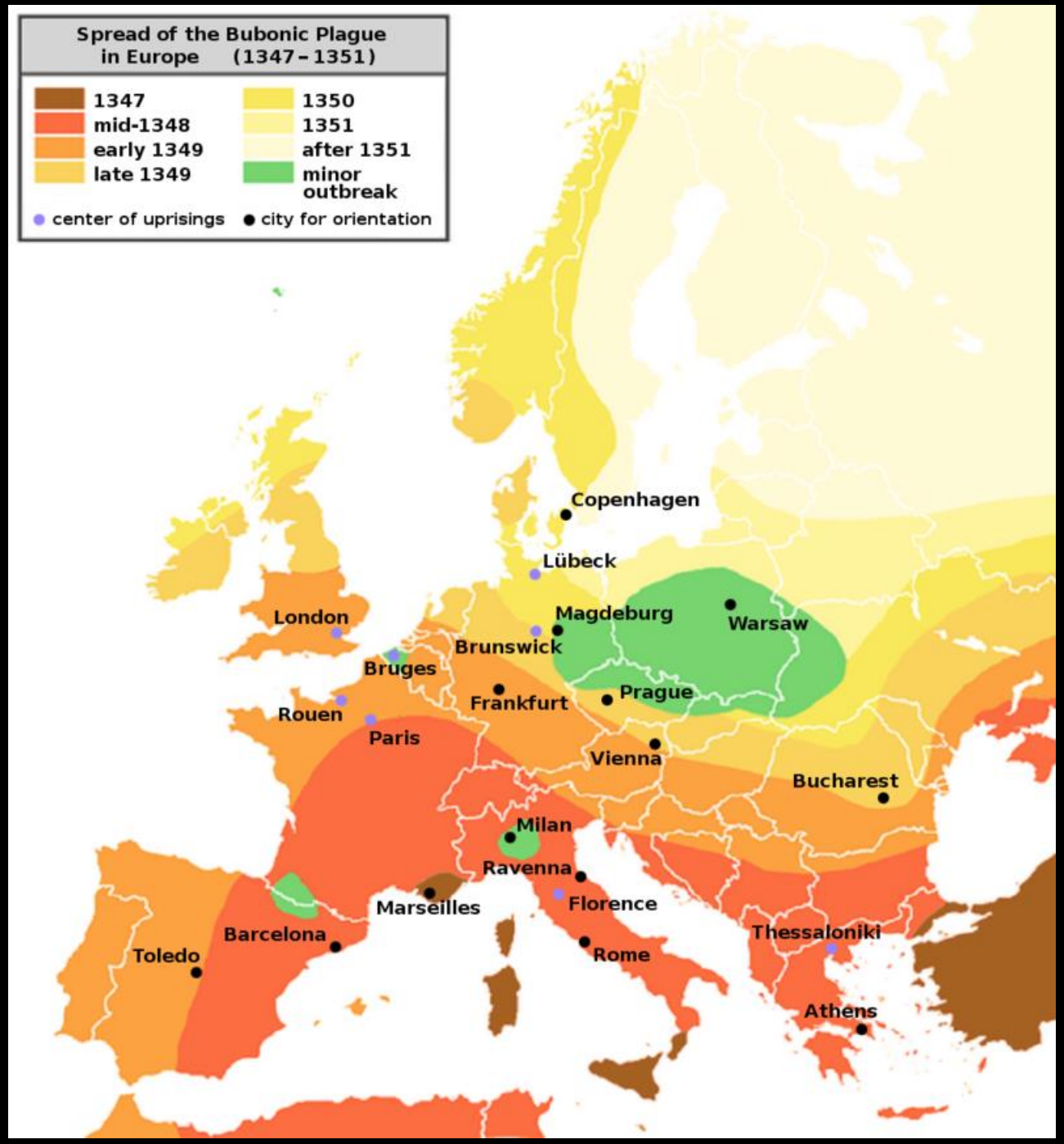
This plague patient is displaying a swollen, ruptured inguinal lymph node, or buboe. After the incubation period of 2-6 days, symptoms of the plague appear including severe malaise, headache, shaking chills, fever, and pain and swelling, or adenopathy, in the affected regional lymph nodes, also known as buboes.

Contemporary painting of Marseille during the Great Plague

The Great Plague of Marseille was the last major outbreak of bubonic plague in western Europe. Arriving in Marseille, France, in 1720, the disease killed a total of 100,000 people: 50,000 in the city during the next two years and another 50,000 to the north in surrounding provinces and towns.

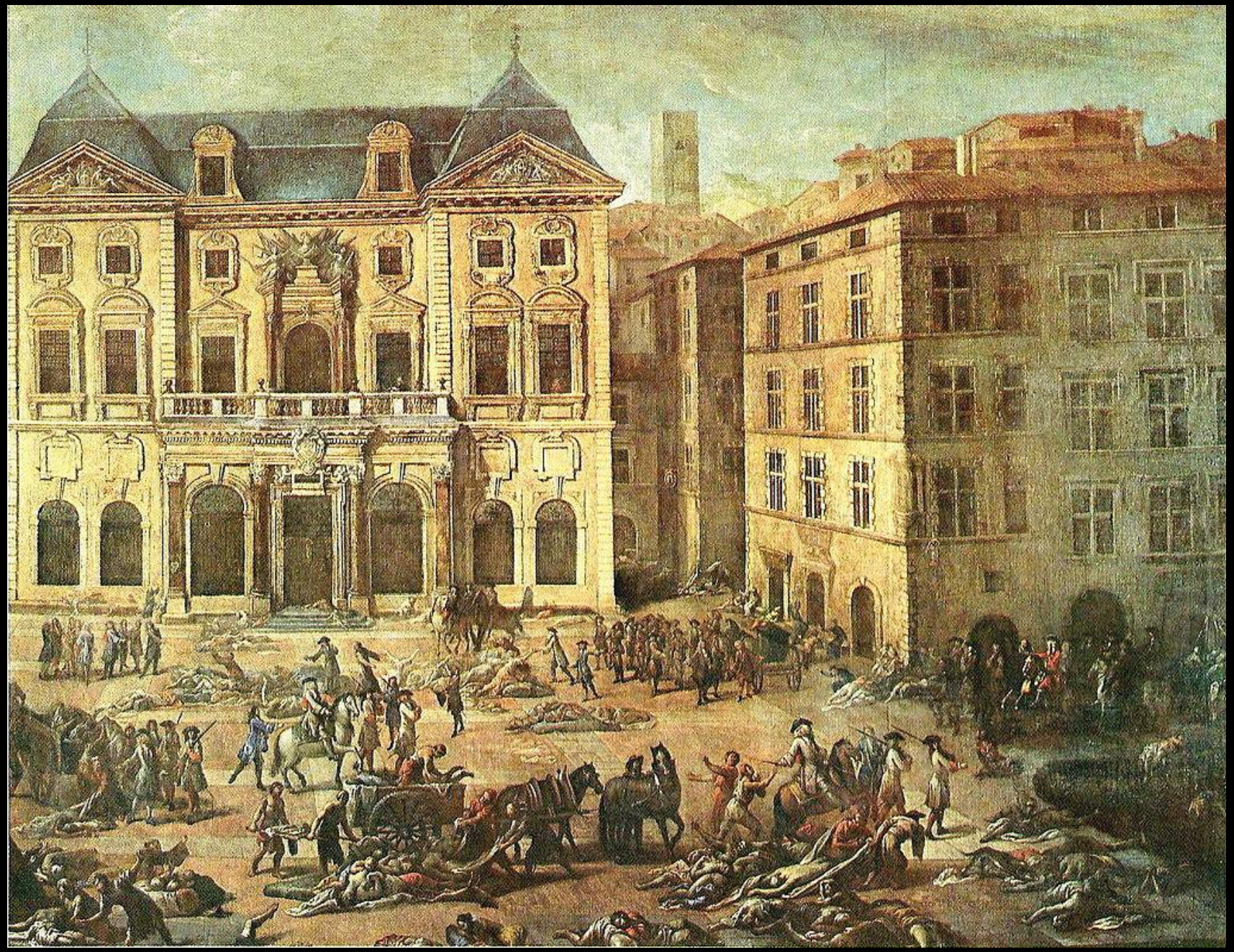
While economic activity took only a few years to recover, as trade expanded to the West Indies and Latin America, it was not until 1765 that the population returned to its pre-1720 level

Chevalier Roze working at Esplanade de la Tourette during the height of the plague, supervising assembling of corpses for mass burial. Painting by Michel Serre.



Spread of the Black Death through Europe (shown with present-day borders), 1347–1351

Arab historians Ibn Al-Wardi and Almaqrizi believed the Black Death originated in Mongolia, and Chinese records show a huge outbreak in Mongolia in the early 1330s. Plague was reportedly first introduced to Europe via Genoese traders from their port city of Kaffa in the Crimea in 1347. During a protracted siege of the city, in 1345–1346 the Mongol Golden Horde army of Jani Beg, whose mainly Tatar troops were suffering from the disease, catapulted infected corpses over the city walls of Kaffa to infect the inhabitants, though it is more likely that infected rats travelled across the siege lines to spread the epidemic to the inhabitants. As the disease took hold, Genoese traders fled across the Black Sea to Constantinople, where the disease first arrived in Europe in summer 1347.



https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_plague_pandemic#/media/File:Marseille-peste-Serre.jpg

Great Plague of Marseille in 1720 killed 100,000 people in the city and the surrounding provinces

In 1466, perhaps 40,000 people died of plague in Paris. During the 16th and 17th centuries, plague visited Paris nearly once every three years, on average. According to historian Geoffrey Parker, "France alone lost almost a million people to plague in the epidemic of 1628–31. Western Europe's last major epidemic occurred in 1720 in Marseilles.